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THE POLITICAL OUTLOOK IN ENGLAND.

BY SIR ELLIS ASHMEAD-BARTLETT, M. P.

THE political situation in England is more confused than it has been for many years. No one seems to have a clear forecast of what the next few months will bring forth. Hitherto the issue has been between the two great parties in the State: between Conservatives and Liberals, or within the last eight years, since Mr. Gladstone's fatal excursus after Home Rule, between Unionists and Gladstonians. Now, however, that Mr. Gladstone has gone, the old dividing line between the parties shows signs of breaking up. The old order seems to be changing and giving place to new. We are on the eve of a development of what M. Gambetta described eighteen years ago in France as *les nouvelles couches sociales*. Lord Rosebery himself, in a recent speech, in reply to the address of the London County Council, adumbrated the formation of a new party.

There is no doubt that the growing interest and importance of the so-called "Labor Question," and the increasing power of the Trades Unions, in and out of Parliament, present a multitude of fresh problems and of fresh political forces which must perplex and may easily upset the calculations of the most experienced political managers. The present government have truckled to the Trades Unions, especially to the most extreme section of them represented by Mr. John Burns, Mr. S. Woods, and other agitators. They have accepted the eight-hour day, which nobody really believes in. They are lowering the hours of work in the Government arsenals and dockyards to eight, thereby imposing an extra burden of nearly 10 per cent. upon the taxpayers. They abandoned the Employers' Liability Bill, although the Lords had passed nine-tenths of it, at the dictation of the Trades Union agitators. They have increased the wages of many artisans in

Government employ. Their budget has been so devised as to throw nearly the whole burden of the increased taxation upon the upper and middle classes.

These are all bids for the labor vote, and they are intended to counteract if possible the unpopular effect of the bad trade and falling wages, which have prevailed during the twenty months since August, 1892, while the Radical party, first under Mr. Gladstone and now under Lord Rosebery, have held office. It is also hoped by the Ministry that their failure to fulfil their promises made at the last election, the painful barrenness of their legislative record, and their phenomenal collapse over Home Rule, may all be overshadowed and forgotten amid the allurements of a proposed "labor" programme. So much for the *nouvelles couches sociales*. Mr. Gladstone himself is evidently not quite easy as to the future ; for in his letter to his constituents in Midlothian, published on March 23d, he addressed some words of grave warning to the working classes, which do him much more credit than his last violent speech in the House of Commons.

There have been some surprising events in our political life within the past six weeks. The first was Mr. Gladstone's resignation on March 3d. The accurate predictions of the *Pall Mall Gazette* had somewhat prepared the public mind for this step, but few expected that it would be accepted so readily and with so little excitement. Hardly a voice was seriously raised against the retirement of the most conspicuous figure identified with English politics for the past sixty years. There has been a considerable amount of regret and eulogy, but even this has been much milder and less earnest than might have been expected. The fact is that Mr. Gladstone's retirement has been felt as a relief, even by his own friends. He was opposed to phases of policy which most of his colleagues realized to be essential for the interests of the country and for their own popularity. The increase in the navy, which was an absolute necessity for the imperial and commercial greatness of England abroad, and even for the safeguarding of the liberties and the food supplies of the nation at home, has been synchronous with Mr. Gladstone's resignation. The settlement of the future of Uganda, upon which depends the future of British power in Eastern and Central Africa, was also impossible so long as Mr. Gladstone turned the balance in favor of surrender. Now by the decision of Lord Rosebery's government to establish a Pro-

tectorate over Uganda and the adjacent regions, British influence will stretch from end to end of the dark continent, from Alexandria to Cape Town. That will be a splendid day for England. The fruition of the work of men like Livingstone and Baker, Gordon and Stanley, Moffat and Frere, will then be finally concluded and richly reaped through the enterprise and statesmanship of Mr. Cecil Rhodes.

What will be Lord Rosebery's future? Will he be able to bend the bow of Ulysses? Can he hold together the heterogeneous mass of faddists, crotcheteers, fanatics, Home Rulers, and revolutionaries that compose the Radical party? It was hard enough for Mr. Gladstone, with his unrivalled parliamentary experience, his matchless dexterity, and his venerable and almost divine prestige, to keep these hostile and often warring factions together, under the shelter of what Mr. Punch once happily described as the "Grand Old Umbrella." Can a young peer, nearly forty years Mr. Gladstone's junior, satisfy the insatiable demands of Irish Nationalists, of Disestablishmentarians, both Welsh and Scotch, of Registration Reformers of many varieties, of Trades Unionists, of Socialists and of Teetotallers, not to say anything about anti-vaccinators, anti-vivisectionists, anti-opium men, and the advocates of peace at any price? Can Lord Rosebery manage to lead such a *pot-pourri* of factions, as a united party, to victory against the solid phalanx of the Conservative and Unionist host?

It is no easy task that Lord Rosebery has undertaken. But he has many requisites for the campaign, difficult as it is. He has perfect confidence in himself. In appearance, manner, and style the new Premier is in every respect the antipodes of his predecessor. He is a patrician, coming of a very old family, and has never had a seat in the House of Commons. He is of barely middle height, inclined to be stout, with a smooth face and an exceedingly boyish appearance. Lord Rosebery has a keen sense of humor, in which Mr. Gladstone was painfully deficient; and he is a master of polished phraseology and epigram. His delivery is deliberate, and rather that of the practised, than of the natural-born, orator. He does not enjoy the iron physique that has stood Mr. Gladstone in such good stead. He has long been delicate and suffered much from insomnia; in this respect it is perhaps fortunate that he is spared the constant and

terrible racket of leading the House of Commons. Like Lord Palmerston and Lord Beaconsfield, Lord Rosebery dislikes, most of all things, being bored. The earnest Radical and the fanatical crotcheteer are an abhorrence to him. But Lord Rosebery has tact and adroitness to repress these feelings of aversion. He can flatter with much dexterity, and the skill with which he has played to the gallery in presiding for a short time over the London County Council, and in his recent attentions to that body, show that the new Prime Minister means to lose no opportunity of extending his popularity and his influence.

Lord Rosebery is now trying to form a new party in Great Britain. He is evidently playing to get the moderate English and Scotch vote. In foreign and colonial politics he is an Imperialist, thereby being in sharp contrast to his predecessor, who was of the old *laissez aller* Manchester school. He believes in upholding the interests and the honor of England abroad. He professes to be as unwilling to yield and surrender to the rivals or foes of England as Mr. Gladstone was always unwilling to resist them. In dealing with French aggression against Siam last summer Lord Rosebery was indeed painfully outwitted and deplorably weak. But then Mr. Gladstone was Premier, and Lord Rosebery may not have had a free hand. He has done much to atone for the awkward consequences of Mr. Gladstone's indiscretions in Egypt. Lord Rosebery is posing as a Radical "Jingo," a very unusual but formidable combination. This imperialism renders him popular with educated Englishmen, and makes him a more difficult leader for Conservative politicians to attack than Mr. Gladstone was, or than Sir William Harcourt would have been. Moreover, the new naval programme, inadequate and temporary though it is, which Lord Rosebery's ministry have put forth, also appeals strongly to the moderate and educated vote of England and Scotland. So does his novel attitude as to Home Rule; especially his emphatic statement that England must be converted to Home Rule before Home Rule can be carried into effect. Lord Cork, who resigned office in 1886 rather than follow Mr. Gladstone in his Home Rule policy, has lately joined Lord Rosebery's Ministry as Master of the Horse.

Though Lord Rosebery has under Irish pressure made some half-hearted attempts to explain away his pregnant pronounce-

ment about the "Conversion of England," he has never really withdrawn it. The practical meaning of such a statement is the postponement of Home Rule to the Greek Kalends; for England never will be converted to Home Rule; certainly never to such a Home Rule scheme as Mr. Gladstone's bill of 1893 contained. That scheme would have given Ireland a separate Parliament of her own to manage Irish affairs, without the intervention of English or Scotch members, and at the same time it would have planted eighty Irish members in the heart of the Imperial or British Parliament, with full power to discuss, to vote upon, to practically contest, every English and Scotch measure. That scheme would have imposed for Imperial expenditure a burden of 35s. a year upon the average Briton, while it would have cut off the average Irishman with only 6s. 6d. a year. It would have inflicted grievous hardships and perils upon the industrious Protestants of Ulster and upon the Loyalists throughout Ireland. It would have prepared a terrible danger for Great Britain by placing an organized and practically independent Ireland in the hands of her bitter enemies; and this close to the great western seaports of Britain and commanding the avenues of British commerce and food supplies. These facts have now been made patent to Englishmen and Scotchmen by the protracted and most valuable debates in the House of Commons upon the Home Rule scheme of 1893.

Lord Rosebery speaks of the anti-Home Rule majority in England as decreasing because England in 1886 sent, out of 485 members, a majority of 213 against Home Rule, whereas in 1892 the English majority for the Union was only 71. But no one knows better than Lord Rosebery the fallacy of his argument. The general election of 1886 was taken upon the question of Home Rule and upon that alone. Hence, England voted almost solidly against it. The general election of 1892 was not taken upon Home Rule at all, but upon the many crotchets and fads of the so-called Newcastle programme. Home Rule was in 1892 kept everywhere in the background by Radical candidates and wire-pullers. If England and Scotland were polled to-morrow upon the issue of Home Rule alone, there would be a greater Unionist majority even than in 1886.

But the Irish Nationalists. It will naturally be asked, What of them? Do they accept this indefinite postponement of Home

Rule? The Irish Nationalist members number 80; 9 are Parnellites, and these have adopted a very independent attitude towards the Radical Government. The 71 Anti-Parnellites have, however, long been Gladstonians or Ministerialists, pure and simple. They receive the official whips and vote far more regularly with the Ministry than do some of the extreme English Radicals. Just now the 71 Anti-Parnellites are particularly subservient to the Government. Their funds are notoriously low. Since the fall of Mr. Parnell and the breach in his once all-powerful band, the subscriptions from the Irish abroad, notably from the American Irish, have grievously fallen off. The result is that the Anti-Parnellite party is in very low water and dependent upon the Radical treasury for its election expenses. The Anti-Parnellites are in no position to quarrel with the Government or to press Lord Rosebery too closely for the meaning of his surprising and heterodox utterances upon Home Rule. Moreover the Anti-Parnellite party is very helpless owing to its internal divisions. Like the Poles, the Irish Nationalists are exceedingly fissiparous. Their parties always split into factions, and their factions subdivide and multiply. There is the main division of Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites. The Anti-Parnellites again are divided into at least three factions that are now quarrelling with and reviling each other with truly Celtic bitterness. Healyites, Sextonites, and Dillonites now detest one another even more than they hate the Saxon. The pristine fame of Committee-Room No. 15 is being revived by their present feuds. So keen are these feuds that the Irish Nationalist members cannot even agree upon the use for the evicted tenants of the £28,000 now lying idle in Paris.

Lord Rosebery is likely to have more trouble with the British Radicals than with the Irish Nationalists. The pranks of that Prince of Farceurs and Arch-Priest of Mischief, Mr. Henry Labouchere, have already given the Government a serious shake, and may cause them further trouble. Some three months back the Radical wire-pullers, at their wits' end for a popular electioneering cry, bethought them of the natural prejudice that exists in a democratic age against a privileged chamber and a titled aristocracy. Their leaders in the Government had wholly failed during their twenty months of office to do anything sufficiently creditable abroad or at home to furnish a taking cry. Accordingly the agitators tried to raise the political wind to the tune of "Down with

the Lords." They forced the Ministry to abandon their Employers' Liability Bill, in order to give color to the onslaught upon the peers. At this moment came Mr. Gladstone's resignation to nip the calculations of the Radicals in the bud. In vain did Mr. Labouchere try to foment an agitation against a "Peer-Premier," as Mr. Gladstone's successor. In vain did he and a few stalwart Radicals try to secure the reversion of the leadership for Sir William Harcourt. That gentleman's long and conspicuous services to his party were ignored. His claims were treated with scant notice, barely even with courtesy by the Liberal press. So soon as it was known that the Queen had sent for Lord Rosebery, the members of Mr. Labouchere's "cave" rapidly shrank, till it was reduced to two only, Mr. Labouchere himself and Mr. Storey.

The agitation against the Lords was killed by the downright satire and ridiculousness of the situation. At the moment that the cry "Down with the Lords" was swelling into volume, a peer was made Prime Minister; five other peers were given high office in his cabinet, and Mr. Gladstone's last tribute to two of his most devoted friends was to raise them to the House of Lords. The Radicals could not go to the country with the battle cry of "Down with the Lords—three cheers for Lord Rosebery." The agitation was snuffed out amid Homeric laughter. Even the long planned and carefully organized demonstration of the trades unions in Hyde Park against the Lords, on March 17, fell very flat, and was a distinct failure. Mr. Labouchere, it is true, had his revenge on March 13, when, by adroit management and surprise, he defeated the Government on his amendment to the address condemning the Lords. He put ministers in a most absurd position, and forced them to adopt the unprecedented course of negating the address to the Crown which they had themselves drawn up and proposed, and of then proposing an entirely new address in a novel form. But the defeat was more a matter of bad whipping on the ministerial side than a genuine test of strength. It afforded much entertainment to the Opposition and infinite amusement to its tricky author. But that was all.

What, then, are the chances of the future? Many expect an early dissolution, possibly in June. Sir William Harcourt's budget at first sight is a clever one. He had a deficit of £4,500,000 (\$22,500,000) to face. The British budget this year caps the climax of all previous budgets. It reaches the enormous total of

£102,700,000, and this under a ministry pledged to economy. Sir William Harcourt meets his deficit first by juggling with the Suez Canal profits and the naval defence sinking fund, and, second, by extra taxation. He equalizes the death duties upon real and personal property and increases them in proportion to the fortune inherited. He places an extra penny upon the Income Tax, but makes some acceptable remission for smaller incomes. He puts an extra sixpence duty per gallon upon spirits and per barrel upon beer. He fears that graduated death duties will press very heavily, and in some cases ruinously, upon landed properties. But the increased spirit and beer duties will be the most troublesome, and perhaps critical, for the government. Mr. Gladstone in 1883 was defeated on a similar tax. If the government carry their budget they will press forward their Registration bill. The main features of this bill are the abolition of all plural voting, and the shortening of the residential term of qualification from twelve months to three months. The first change will, of course, tell against the wealthy and leisured classes, who are now all Conservative. At present a man who has different property, for which he pays rates in several constituencies, may have a vote for each. Thus a merchant in the city of London has a vote there in virtue of his business offices. He also has a vote for his residence, which may be in the West End or in a suburb of the metropolis. The second will put a large number of the poorest, least settled, and most migratory class upon the electoral register; and these are naturally Radicals. If the House of Lords reject this Registration bill, the Radical wire-pullers will again try to raise a cry against the Upper House, and will hope thereby to divert the attention of the electors from Home Rule. Probably the Radicals will postpone the elections till after the Derby, which is early in June, because they calculate that, if Lord Rosebery wins that great race, many electors will be led "to back his luck" by giving him their votes.

The contest will be very severe, and to prophesy is most dangerous. The probability now is that the Unionist party will gain some seats in England and possibly four or five in Scotland. Ireland will remain about as it is—eighty Nationalists to twenty-three Unionists. The present Radical majority in the House of Commons is only thirty-five; a loss of eighteen seats would destroy it. The results of seven bye-elections have lately become known,

four in Scotland, two in England, and one in Wales, and they are distinctly encouraging to the Unionist cause. The bye-elections have already falsified Lord Rosebery's statement that the majority against Home Rule is "a reducing majority." Seven elections have been taken since March 1st. The result has been to show a reduction of the Separatist majorities of 1892 by no less than 38 per cent. If the same results happen at the General Election, not only will the Separatists be in a far greater minority than they are at present in England, but they will be also in a minority in the Imperial Parliament. Accordingly Home Rule seems likely to be hung up till the Greek Kalends. Even in Scotland, where ministers have put forth their utmost endeavors, and where Lord Rosebery and Mr. Asquith both undertook personal electioneering work, the Radical majorities of 1892 have been appreciably pulled down. The Unionist gain of 1,522 votes on Radical majorities, amounting to 2,756, or about 40 per cent., certainly cannot be described as a "reducing Unionist majority." The election in Wales is still more satisfactory. In that stronghold of Radicalism and disestablishmentarianism the Separatist majority was reduced from 815 to 225—a reduction of over 70 per cent. Adding the total reduction in the seven constituencies together, the result is that we get a diminution of the Separatist majority by over 38 per cent. This is certainly highly satisfactory and gratifying to the Unionist party.

Month by month the dangerous influence of the Home Rule policy is being more widely and more plainly felt in the United Kingdom. The principle of separation, or autonomy, once adopted is operating as actively and as perilously as in Austria, if not as in Turkey. The Home Rule serpent is for the moment scotched for Ireland, but the fatal virus is working throughout the whole body politic.

Everywhere the ministerial programme is antagonistic to England and the English race. There is a Conservative and Unionist majority of seventy-one members in England proper. Therefore the government policy is persistently hostile to English predominance. The Separatist and Radical fads and prejudices of Irishmen, Scotchmen, and Welshmen are humored and favored in every possible way, but no English need apply.

Every day a fresh proposal for the injury and ruin of some great national institution or to wreck some great English interest

is laid by the Ministry before Parliament. Their bill for the disestablishment and plunder of the church in Wales caps the climax of their unjust and Anarchical programme. Without the slightest excuse except the selfish aim of holding the votes of twenty-eight Welsh Radical members, the ministry propose to uproot and to rob the most ancient portion of the church in this country, and to give a stimulus to separation and plunder all over the United Kingdom. By this attack upon the church in Wales the parallels are opened for an early onslaught upon the church in England. Indeed, the Church of England is already and directly attacked. A whole English county, Monmouthshire, which has never been in Wales, and which is entirely English in language and preponderatingly English in blood, is to be filched from England and deprived of its church, in order to gratify Welsh disestablishers. The Scotch are to have a separate Scotch grand committee for Scotch affairs, in order that the Government may increase their normal parliamentary majority from 5 per cent. to over a 100 per cent. on that committee. Ireland and Wales are to have similar separate grand committees granted to them, but England, the chief and central country, the heart and core of the greatness of the United Kingdom, and of the whole Empire, is refused this privilege. There is to be no separate grand committee for England. English affairs and English interests are still to be dominated and controlled in Parliament by Scotch and Welsh and Irish Radicals; while Irish, Welsh, and Scotch affairs are to be practically freed from English interference. By their so-called Registration Bill, the Government deal a further blow at English influence and English rights. The Irish Nationalists have twenty-three seats in Parliament, more than they are entitled to, even by population. The Welsh Radicals have three more seats than their fair share. These twenty-six seats should certainly go to England, which is under-represented, whether judged by population or by wealth or by taxation. The Government refuse to take any steps to redress, in favor of England, this gross inequality of representation. Quite the reverse: they propose to shorten the residential period of qualification, so as to give predominance to the shifting, the least substantial, the migratory section of the population over the stable, the domestic, and the industrious electors. By their Evicted Tenants' Bill the Government propose to give

£100,000 of the nation's money to relieve the lawbreakers and dishonest conspirators who founded and who followed the plan of campaign to help the foolish and lawless men who, Mr. Dillon said "could pay, but would not pay because he told them not to pay"; and to rescue Mr. William O'Brien and Mr. John Dillon, from the unpopularity in Ireland into which they have deservedly fallen, at least £100,000 of National money is to be squandered.

The final decision, as Lord Rosebery sees clearly enough, rests with England and the English electors. The Radicals are now making every conceivable effort to divert the attention of the country from Home Rule. If the Unionist party can concentrate the attention of Great Britain, that is of England and Scotland, upon the issue of Home Rule, the victory must be with the Union. If, on the other hand, Lord Rosebery and the Radical wire-pullers succeed in confusing the issue, in diverting the attention of the electors to other questions, labor, registration, disestablishment, etc., and, above all, if they succeed in making the English people believe that there is no real danger of Home Rule, then Lord Rosebery may triumph. This is the key of the position—whether the electors vote, at the next general election, upon Home Rule or upon side and minor issues.

The main battle cry of the Unionist party at the coming election will be, first, "The Union"; and, second, "An appeal to the national pride and honor of the English people." The English people have been for so long a period so great and strong, so world-compelling and imperial, that they have almost lost their sense of nationality. The onslaughts that are now being made upon English greatness and English ascendancy by the Radicals and Separatists are, however, at last reviving English sentiment. If the Unionist party can thoroughly inspire and arouse the national spirit of England, Lord Rosebery and his heterogeneous following will be swept away like chaff.

ELLIS ASHMEAD-BARTLETT.